

Harmon A. Chambers Museum, Carbondale, PA 18407

By S. Robert Powell

Harmon A. Chambers opened a museum in Carbondale, PA. The museum was housed in a building on the northeast corner of the intersection of Church Street and Salem Avenue. The building no longer stands.

In the course of his research in the newspaper archives in the collection of the Carbondale Historical Society, Donald W. Powell discovered the following articles/notices about the Chambers Museum:

1. *Carbondale Transcript and Lackawanna Journal*, Volume 5, No. 14, November 18, 1853, p. 2, column 1:

CHAMBERS' CABINET OF CURIOSITIES, (an advertisement of which will be found in another column) is one of the best Collections we have ever seen. It is a complete study for the Naturalist, Geologist, Mineralogist and Antiquary, containing an endless variety of articles to attract the attention and call forth inquiry. In the numerous visits we have paid this Cabinet, nothing so much attracted our attention as the Ancient Manuscripts on Papyrus, in different languages of a past age. To us of course they are unintelligible, but Mr. Chambers we understand, has their translations by some of the most renowned Eastern travellers. We shall endeavor as soon as our time will permit, to favor our readers with a somewhat elaborate description of this Collection, and in the meantime apprise them that it has cost, in time and money, no inconsiderable sum, and the taste and talent and patient industry displayed in its collection and arrangement, should be appreciated by all, not only the *curious Antiquarian*, but all who delight in investigating, either the wonderful in Nature, or the mysterious in Art, as connected with by-gone times. It is really a valuable acquisition in any community, and when opened to the public, should be visited by all.

The museum was not yet open on November 18, 1853.

[Advertisement.]

The Demonstration

At the City Hall last evening was one of great interest. There were many smart Speeches and much excellent Music discoursed, and all seemed to regret that Messrs. Archbald and Clarkson contemplated removing from among us ; but all seemed united in the belief that H. A. CHAMBERS has the largest and best *Collection of Antiquities and Curiosities* that can be found in this State, and when it was whispered that they too about to be removed from this City, great fears were entertained that it would be done without the People having an opportunity to examine them. In order to quiet the minds of the People on this subject, he has concluded to give all the citizens an opportunity to examine them, or or about the first of January next, (notice of which will be given hereafter.)

THIS COLLECTION CONTAINS
of Coins and Medals, more than 2,500 different varieties ; of these, about 1,000 are ancient Greek and Roman : about 200 are from the ruins of Herculaneum. Also several Coins of the Cities of Syracuse, Corinth, &c. Hebrew Coins, including the Shekel of Israel ; Consular Coins two thousand six hundred years old ; Coins of all the Cæsars, Roman Emperors, Empresses, &c., an enumeration of which could not be contained in a common sized newspaper.

OF MINERALS,
about 1000 Specimens from all parts of the World.

OF FOSSILS,
~~several varieties of~~ Lepidodendron, Sigillaria, Stigmaria, Calamites, ~~Ferns, Trilobites, Echin~~ nites, Cyathophyllum, Heliophyllum, Echinus, Shells, Ammonites, &c, &c. Several monstrous Teeth of the Mastodon and other extinct monsters from Missouri, Alabama, Africa and the East Indies, and of the Fossil Shark from the marl of New Jersey.

Chambers Museum
to be opened on or
about January 1,
1854

The Collection of Shells contains several thousand, among them are the most beautiful ones to be found. A large and beautiful Collection of Corals—about 50 different varieties. Twenty different varieties of Enchinus, or Sea Eggs. This collection cannot be excelled by any in the United States. Twenty-three specimens of Star Fish, some very rare varieties, from the Island of Borneo and the Coast of China; about 50 other different varieties of Fish from the Coast of China, the Phillippine Islands, &c., among them some very curious Flying Fish.

A large Collection of PETRIFICATIONS of Wood, Moss, Leaves, Shells, Eggs, &c.

Some rare old Manuscripts on Parchment and Papyrus. There is in this Cabinet a large collection of Curiosities Ancient and Modern, too great to enumerate. Among these are several from the Tombs in Egypt; some very rare Manuscripts on Papyrus, in the Hieratic, Hieroglyphic, Coptic, Demotic and Ancient Greek Languages; Mummy Cloth, Beads, Nuts, Earthen Ware, &c. These articles were obtained from DR. HENRY ABBOTT of Cairo in Egypt, who took them from Tombs in Thebes, Memphis, Sakkara, Dendara, &c., where they had lain for 4000 years.

He has also a Collection of CONTINENTAL BILLS—51 different varieties; among them are some rare varieties put out by the General Assemblies of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, *the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, the Colony of Massachusetts, Massachusetts State, State of Massachusetts Bay, New Castle, Kent and Sussex upon Delaware, the Province of Pennsylvania, &c.

All Contributions to this Cabinet will be acknowledged by Labels attached to the same.

H. A. CHAMBERS.

Carbondale, Nov. 16th, 1853.

The Spiritual Controversy
 At present being published in the 'Transcript,' has created a great excitement in this community, but not to be compared to the excitement on the announcement that CHAMBERS was about to remove his collection of Antiquities and Curiosities from this city. Keep cool—he intends to give all an opportunity to examine this collection without charge about the first of next month.—Contributions solicited.

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H. A. CHAMBERS.

Carbondale, Nov. 30th, 1853.

4. More on the "Spiritual Controversy" in Carbondale at the time. *Carbondale Transcript and Lackawanna Journal*, Volume 5, Number 12, November 4, 1853, page 2, column 6:

"Spiritualism."

The alledged "Spiritual Manifestations," or in other words, an intelligent inter-communication between the mundane and super-mundane spheres--between the living and departed dead, seems to be attracting increased attention, not only in our own city but throughout the entire country, judging from what we hear and from the statements of the press upon that subject.

For ourselves we know nothing in relation to the alledged wonders and miracles from personal observation, but judging from what we notice in our exchanges, there is no probability that the wonderful phenomena called "Spiritual" and the astounding alledged facts they develope, are by any means likely to pass away to the shades of oblivion; on the contrary, it would appear that they are constantly progressing and gaining some new impetus every day.

What will be the final issue of all these new developments we are wholly unprepared to determine; certain it is that there is abroad a strange and to us unknown influence, silently disseminating itself in the minds of thousands, creating a new and distinctive belief in relation to the future life, that would appear to menace the perpetuity of all existing theological organizations. Already is this new faith creating much difficulty in the various Churches, not only in this city, but it would appear throughout the United States and some parts of Europe.

While we are totally unprepared to express an intelligent opinion touching this subject as regards its truth or falsity, nevertheless we do not feel justifiable in denouncing it as a humbug or imposition, as many of our cotemporaries have done, without further evidence than that of entire ignorance from personal investigation.

We have been repeatedly requested by a large and intelligent number of our patrons to open our columns to the consideration of this subject; and we take this occasion to say that we are willing to concede to the request to a limited extent, tho' we can by no means endorse whatever may be communicated to our columns. If, therefore, the friends or opponents of the new faith desire to be heard through the medium of this journal upon the subject of Spiritual Intercourse, we concede the privilege, under proper restrictions, and must hold the writers responsible for what may hereafter appear.

5. *Carbondale Transcript and Lackawanna Journal*, after Volume 5, Number 29 (April 7, 1854 and before Volume 5, Number 36 (June 18, 1854). The museum building was still standing in 2019, when it was destroyed by fire.

ONLY ONE DOLLAR.

20,000 GIFTS



FOR THE PEOPLE.

The subscriber would announce to the citizens of the United States, that he will present

20,000 VALUABLE AND COSTLY GIFTS

To the Purchaser of "SEASON TICKETS" to his MUSEUM. This Museum contains more than 40,000 Curiosities and Antiquities, from all parts of the world. The Collection of Coins and Medals is the largest and best on this Continent, there being over 3,500 different kinds. Each Ticket to admit the Purchaser to his

MUSEUM, AT CARBONDALE,

As often as they please, at all proper times, from the

10TH OF MAY, UNTIL THE FIRST OF AUGUST, 1854,

AND ENTITLE THE HOLDER TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING

20,000 GIFTS, &c

TO BE DISTRIBUTED WHEN 20,000 TICKETS ARE SOLD

1	HOUSE AND LOT	in the city of Carbondale, Pa., (a correct view taken from a daguerreotype is shown in the above engraving.) This house was built by the subscriber for his own residence, it is nearly new, well built, and thoroughly finished; painted and papered: is supplied with the best of spring water, and is heated by Culver's patent furnace; in the kitchen is a grate, brick oven, &c.: on the floor of dining room, halls, &c., is about one hundred square yards of best oil-cloth; and in the yard is a large and beautiful cast-iron fountain, nine feet high, which has a receiving basin about twenty five feet in circumference; together with about 1500 feet of water-logs, new and just put down, with water privilege, &c. The basement or first story is suitable for a store, office, or shop. This room has been rented for \$20 per month. The above property is free from encumbrance, and the articles named, and all others appertaining to said property, with fruit and ornamental trees, &c., will all go together,	\$5,000
1	STORE AND LOT,	on Main Street, in the city of Carbondale, adjoining Bronson's Hotel; is new and well finished, has the largest and best Sales Room in the city, and free from encumbrance,	3,200
1	DWELLING HOUSE,	about 20 by 28 feet, painted and papered,	350
1	SPLENDID PIANO-FORTE,		400
1	"	FIVE-OCTAVE MELODEON, Prince's manufacture,	100
11	"	OIL PAINTINGS, 36 by 30 inches with heavy gilded frames, \$50 each,	550
1	"	" " " 25 by 30 " Constantinople heavy gilded frame,	20
1	"	" " " " " Water Piece,	20
1	"	" " " 25 by 30 " View in Switzerland,	25
1	"	" " " " " Port of Texel,	25
1	"	" " " 24 by 31 " Night Scene, " Vesuvius "	28
1	"	" " " 22 by 26 " Night Scene " Iurbiide " maple frame	30
1	NEW BASS VIOL,	(two Books and Bow, cost in New York)	25
1	(FIFTEEN-DAY) CLOCK,	Alabaster Columns, and Pearl Ornaments,	34
1	(TWELVE-DAY) PATENT LEVER,	Jewelled,	15
1	LARGE PICTURE	(Clay Monument) with frame and Glass,	5
1	"	Washington,	3
1	"	Christ Weeping over Jerusalem,	3
1	SET OF FOUR PICTURES,	Mazeppa,	2
1	"	Voyage of Life,	3
4	GOLD WATCHES,	\$50 each,	200
300	SUBSCRIPTIONS	to "CARBONDALE TRANSCRIPT," one year each,	600

300 SUBSCRIPTIONS to "CARBONDALE TRANSCRIPT," one year each,.....	600
250 " " to "LACKAWANNA HERALD," " "	500
1000 PORTE MONAIES,.....	750
2000 PIECES OF MUSIC,.....	500
1000 GOLD PENS,.....	1000
1000 GOLD RINGS,.....	2000
6000 STEEL ENGRAVINGS,.....	1500
8416 COLORED PICTURES,.....	2104

Total, 20,000 Gifts,.....Amounting to \$18,992

In order to secure a perfectly fair and satisfactory partition of the GIFTS, Mr. Chambers proposes that the Shareholders shall meet together at the City Hall, in the city of Carbondale, on the First MONDAY OF AUGUST NEXT, to select from their number a Committee, under whose supervision the distribution will take place. This Committee will be subject to the instructions of the shareholders, and distribute the Gifts among them in such way or manner as the Shareholders may determine upon.

Shareholders who cannot attend the meeting for distribution, will stand an equal chance of obtaining the best Gifts: and whatever may fall to them, will be forwarded as they may direct.

REFERENCES:—The Mayor, either of the Aldermen, Select or Common Council District Attorney, Postmaster, or any other persons in the city of Carbondale, Pa.; Messrs. H. A. Gould and Henry Wilbur, New York; J. C. Oram, Philadelphia; H. N. Merriman, Albany; E. Harries, Mining Engineer, Glendon Iron Works, Easton, Pa. Numerous others of the highest respectability can also be given, if required.


All orders for Tickets must be addressed, post-paid, money enclosed, to H. A. CHAMBERS, Carbondale, Pa., and the tickets will be promptly forwarded to any address. Price One Dollar, or eleven tickets for Ten Dollars.

CARBONDALE, Pa., May 1, 1854.

H. A. Chambers.

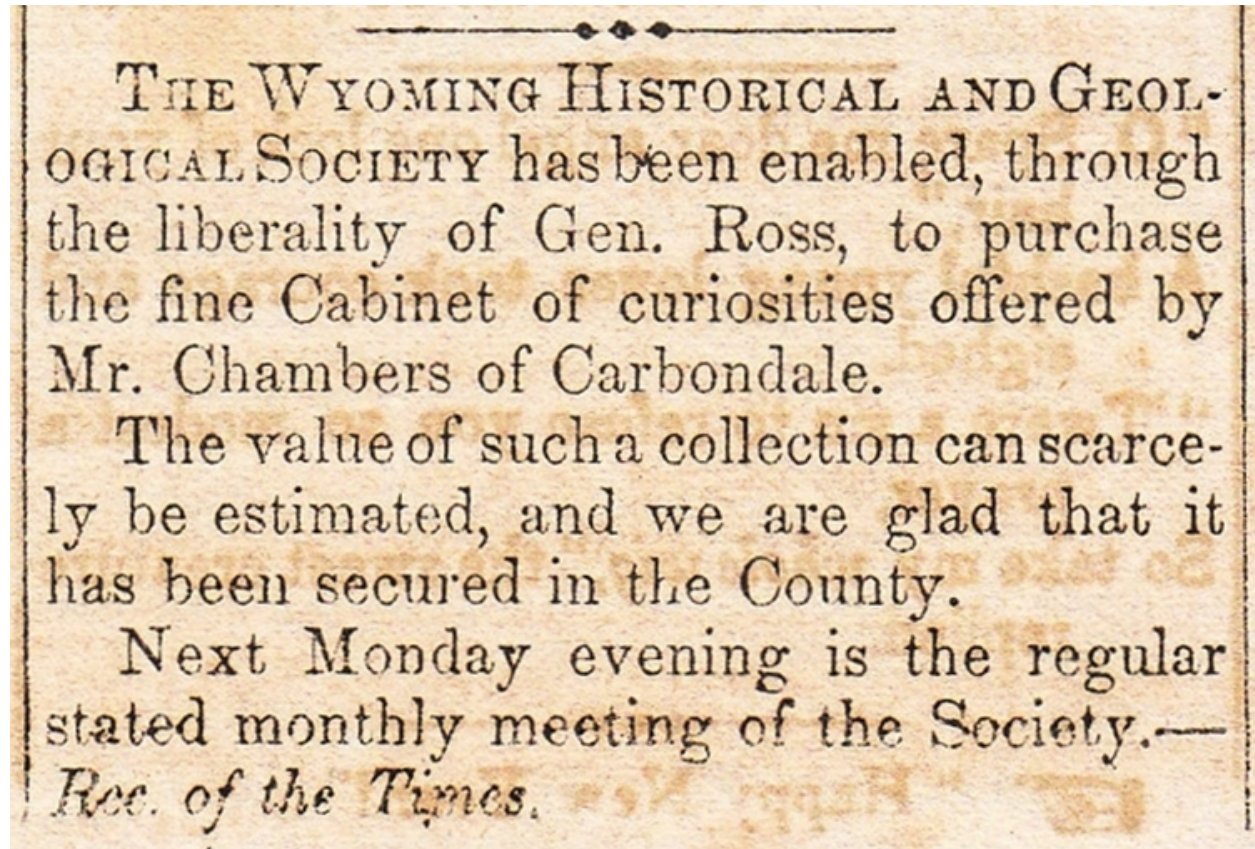
6. *Carbondale Transcript and Lackawanna Journal*, Volume 5, Number 41, August 4, 1854, page 3, column 3:

CHAMBERS' MUSEUM,
Containing 40,000 Curiosities
and Antiquities,



OPEN EVERY DAY, (Sundays excepted)
from 7 A. M., till 7 P. M. There will be no
charge for admission, and all are invited to call
and examine the articles contained therein.

7. The collection of the Harmon A. Chambers Museum in Carbondale was purchased in 1859 by the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society. *Weekly Advance*, Volume 11, Number 31, Saturday, January 1, 1859, page 2, column 2:



In a conversation that Donald W. Powell had with Charles Petrillo, following the Hurricane Agnes flood in Wilkes-Barre, Donald learned that the holdings of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society were all destroyed in that flood.

Commentary by S. Robert Powell:

On October 22, 2019, John Van Horne, Director Emeritus of The Library Company of Philadelphia, sent the following letter to S. Robert Powell:

Dear Mr. Powell,

I found your name and email address while searching for sources on the history of Carbondale. You certainly seem to be the man who might have the answer to my question!

I am working on a project to reconstruct the contents of the first two museums in Philadelphia -- those of Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere and Charles Willson Peale. In the course of my research I have come across a very rare pamphlet, *A Catalogue of Rare and Valuable Coins, Medals, Minerals, Fossils, Corals, Shells, Manuscripts, Antiquities, Curiosities, &c., &c., &c. Collected and Arranged by Harmon A. Chambers, Carbondale, Pa.* (Carbondale, [1858]). It's a 23-page pamphlet that lists thousands of things collected by Chambers, including several Native American relics and other items identified as having come from Peale's Museum. In case you don't know of this fascinating publication of your city's history, I attach a pdf of the copy at the American Philosophical Society (and I know of no others).

Can you tell me anything about Chambers or what might have happened to his impressive collection? Did any of it remain in Carbondale and perhaps become part of the collections of the Historical Society? I would appreciate whatever light you might be able to shed on this mystery.

With thanks for your courtesies, I am, Sincerely, John

John C. Van Horne
Director Emeritus
The Library Company of Philadelphia
1312 Medford Rd., Wynnewood, PA 19096

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The pdf copy of the catalogue of the Harmon A. Chambers Museum in Carbondale is given here. We have never before seen this extremely rare catalogue. As is noted in that catalogue, several objects that were on display in Chambers' museum in Carbondale were formerly in the Charles Willson Peale Museum in Philadelphia--which is why we have given Peale's well known self-portrait, in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, in Philadelphia, at the head of this entry.